

William Short to Thomas Jefferson, November 12, 1821, from the Thomas Jefferson and William Short Correspondence, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W. Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

William Short to Thomas Jefferson

Philada. Nov. 12. 1821

Dear Sir

If I knew any other way less troublesome to you or hearing of you & the state of your health, I would not intrude this letter on you, knowing, as I do, how much you are oppressed by correspondence. Since my return from a summer excursion of more than three months, I have enquired at different times of such of your friends here as were in the way of hearing from you, but there is not one that has been able to give me any late intelligence on your subject. And yet it is a subject of so much real interest to me, that I cannot help making an effort to remove the state of absolute ignorance in which I am. May I hope then if too much occupied by other correspondence yourself, you would tax your amiable amanuensis so far as to indite what you might dictate without manual labor. It would be a great gratification to me to learn that your health was perfectly restored, & promised a continuance. Your sound constitution, your regular life, & the salubrious air of Monticello all combined to give me full confidence in your enjoying to the full term of your years, uninterrupted health. This was never shaken until the illness, which was not spontaneous, but as I understand, acquired at the Springs. I have never known, though I have always wished to know, the particulars of that deviation from your ordinary cause of

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health-its origin, its progress & its termination. When you last mentioned your health to me, nothing remained of your indisposition, but a swelling of the legs which

obliged you to bandage them so as make it inconvenient to take the exercise of walking.

It would give me great pleasure also to hear something of the University, its present situation & future prospect. There is no similar establishment in which I feel so great an interest. This grows out of a variety of considerations. In the first place, as being so much of your creation; & the, being situated in that district, where for the first time in my life had a view of a mountain, a sensation I have never forgotten & which has always attached me to the place. And besides, it is in Virginia, my native State, & the first from which I recieved a mark of favor, the first therefore in my affection. The only apprehension I have felt from that location, arose from the preference which Professors would generally give to a residence in a City, on account of the advantages it affords to men of letters & science. Yet I believe it was fortunate that Caesee left you. The mass of prejudices enlisted against him would probably have more than counterbalanced the weight of his talents, great as they are.

I have lately recieved a letter from a nephew of mine who went to pay his respects to you at Monticello. He speaks in high terms of the Architectural progress of the University. When he determined to take that route to Kentucky, he wrote to me from Baltimore to ask me to send him a letter of introduction to you. And with the etourderie of his age, requested me to send it to Fredericksburg, through which place he was to pass. As his letter was written at the moment he was leaving Baltimore, it was evident that my letter could not reach Fredericksburgh before he would have left it. He fortunately met there, as he informs me, with a Mr Talliaferro who gave him a letter to you. He waited also on Mr. Madison, as he informs me, being carried there by the stepson of that gentleman. To him, of course, I should not have given him a letter. For although I have never known the true cause of it, I have always known the want of friendly feelings on his part towards me. And

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yet I am fully persuaded, as you are so good as to say in your former letter, that you never heard, but a sentiment of esteem for me from him. This he owed to his respect for you. These things are now the incidents of times long passed by, & make but feeble impression on my mind.

On my return here, I learned that an old friend of ours, Govr. Mercer, had come on to this City in a bad state of health & found his death here. I am told by one of those who saw him the most, that his first enquiry was for me, & that his expression of regret at my absence was very marked. I was more affected by this circumstance than I can say. Such recollections from a friend of early life from whom I have been so long separated, leaves a melancholy impression on the mind that fixes itself deeply. When I look back to the time at which he & “the good M...our President” started together in their political race it seem to me the renewal of the fable of the Hare & the Tortoise.

In my tour of this summer I had intended to have included an excursion to Canada, where I have never been, & where I should not go merely as a tourist; all curiosity of that kind having now subsided with me. But I am an involuntary owner of a considerable body of land near the River St. Lawrence, to which, it had been represented me by my agent, it was necessary for me to go. When on the St. Lawrence, it is much the easiest & quickest route to return by the way of Montreal, taking advantage of the descent of the River, & the steamboat on Lake Champlain. But when I had proceeded as far as Sackett's Harbour, I found that the season had so far advanced that it would be advisable to postpone going to the St. Lawrence until the next year & therefore retraced my steps at that time.

In this route I found M. LeRay de Chaumont. He owns in the county where he resides, & which bears your name, a territory more extensive than many of the German Princes, notwithstanding that he has sold to the rich D. Parish 110,000 acres & to Joseph Bonaparte, a still larger quantity. The land he owns, is also among the most fertile & the most valuable of the unsettled lands of the State of N. York.

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And yet with all this he is, I fear, what the French call un riche malaisé. If so, it would be a proof that no one in that part of the world can be a large landholder with impunity. For LeRay has show more skill & perseverance in that line than any of his compeers. Many of them I know, who were once ranked among the most wealthy men of the State, & who are now in the greatest embarassment. As to LeRay himself I have no reason to suppose any thing of the kind, except what I have heard from xothers. His mode of life in his Chateau would indicate the contrary. He sees a great deal of company, has an excellent French cook, French table &c.

In this excursion I visited the great Canal, & travelled on it from Utica to Rome (75 miles) It was then perfected & used 88 miles & since 22 miles more have been completed & used. It is really in this canal that the U. States seemed to me to be centuries advanced beyond what appears in any other part of the country. The state of N.Y. owes this advancement to one man-for DeWit Clinton stands precisely in the same relation to the canal that Fulton does to the steamboat. And yet it was whilst washed along on this canal that I heard him more abused than in any other part of the State, where he is generally now very unpopular. So true is it that he who labors to do good to men, must look for his reward in his own bosom & not in their gratitude.

I have read over at different times, & with renewed & increased pleasure your latest letters, of which one inclosed the syllabus. The subject is most interesting whether considered on the score of morality or religion. The greatest drawback I have found in this pleasure is not being permitted to communicate it to one or two friends, when we have been speaking on the subject-for you may rest assured that your injunction has been literally obeyed. I think it very perceptible that opinions like yours as to Jesus, are spreading fast in this country. More light will dispel the foggy sophisms of the interested imposed on the ignorant. It's from the East that this new light has proceeded & particularly from Boston.

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My paper warns me that I must end this letter. Otherwise I might perhaps tax your time & patience too heavily. I have only room left to repeat that I am as I have ever been & shall ever be yours with warm affection, your friend & servant WShort

RC (Jefferson Papers, DLC)